

The Appearance of the Buddha has been a Blessing to the World

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Just a brief Vesak-time reminder to those who uphold Buddhism as their religious creed. As a Buddhist, I am seriously asking myself the question 'My Buddhistness: what good does it do to others?'

In my own world, my Buddhistness means that I have chosen to accept the Buddha [Chinese Fo], i.e. Shakyamuni or Buddha Gotama as my teacher and abide by his teachings or Dharma [Chinese Fa] as the one and only guide through my religious life. Both my Master and his teachings present the life I live as a human, here and now, as one of a series that is ceaselessly going on in an endless process called Samsara. We are what we are today, not because of the impact of one life but a series that has preceded our arrival here.

Life of humans in the world is globally extensive here and there, and people have lived on this earth through several millennia. The attitude of people to life, primarily from birth to death, and with some others even beyond death, has varied according to the religio-cultural maturity they have reached during their varied periods of incubation. In this, the ancient east, and the less ancient west, stand in marked contrast.

Buddhists are taught to look upon life in the universe as one of cosmic evolution through time, pronouncing something not dissimilar to the Big Bang and Big Crunch theories of some modern scientific groups. [We do not propose to go

into details here regarding the *samvatta* and *vivatta kappa* theories referred to in Buddhist literature which are almost parallels of the above.]. Buddhists hold no notion of life as being created sectionally, in any specific region of the earth, in the interest of one group or another. They know not of *persona grata*, in terms of created beings down here on earth, nor of divine groups from above who share in the defense of or involve themselves in offensives against other human groups. Appeals for such militant cooperation and assistance and supplications for ethno-religious victories over one's self-generated enemies are totally unknown in Buddhist thinking.

Thus Buddhist thinking requires that life in the world should be looked upon as a reasonable and meaningful cosmic unity as is implied in modern scientific concepts like ecosystems and biota. It is such a vision alone and not mere prayers for partisan perpetuation and multiplication which will facilitate survival of man on earth. It is on this basis that the entire system of religious culture in Buddhism, leading up to the final liberation in Nirvana is built up. It is no mere accident that the next Buddha who is said to appear in the world at later period of time is named **Maitreya** [Japanese Miroku] or **Loving Friendliness**. It is derived from the Sanskrit word *maitri* or the state of being a friend or *mitra*.

On this basis, the very first stage of Buddhist religious culture or spiritual growth is built upon five items of moral goodness which are referred to as *panca sila* [**Chinese wu chieh**].

These are calculated to be no more than five items of good inter-personal relationships in the midst of humans. These start with respect for all life in the world we live, without any arrogance that one grade has been created to be consumed by another, agreed upon by humans as being superior to the other. This kind of lopsided religious thinking brings upon life in the world, both human and animal, more misery, death and destruction than any conceivable benefit. It took the United Nations more than two millennia to conceive its human rights to

safe guard life, [and that only of humans]. The concept of *panca-sla*, in the hands of saner Indian religious thinkers like the Jainas and the Buddhists, antedates these human rights by several millennia.

In the area of *panca-sila* of the Buddhist it is important to reckon that two other vices which are menacing the world today have been brought within its purview. They are violence against women [including all acts of sexual misdemeanor, with connivance or otherwise] under item No.3 which reads as *kamesu micchacara* or sexual promiscuity and under item No.4 which reads *surameraya-majjapamada-tthana* or misdeeds arising from errors of judgement in the area of drugs and alcohol. It is on the universal relevance and worth of these socio-cultural injunctions that *panca-sila* came to be propagated in Buddhist literature as the universally applicable socio-political ethic which the Buddhist Universal Monarch or Cakkavatti King delivers to all his political subordinates who come to him, seeking his advice on the governance of their kingdoms.

In a religiously, ethnically and politically torn and embittered world as we witness today, sponsored and championed all the time by self-opinionated world leaders in the east or west, north or south, in both areas of religion and society, humanity is suffering untold misery, in the hands of humans. If these twenty-five centuries old words of wisdom of the Buddha are meaningfully understood, without pride or prejudice, one would not hesitate to crown the Buddha as the one and only non-sectarian and non-partisan savior of mankind who has ever appeared on earth, who never sponsored a war of one group against another who are arrogantly condemned and despised as non-believers. It is time today that his line of self-glorifying arrogant thinking be completely taken off the world and man be left free with unfettered judgment to work out his own salvation, with human wisdom sitting impartially on human affairs.